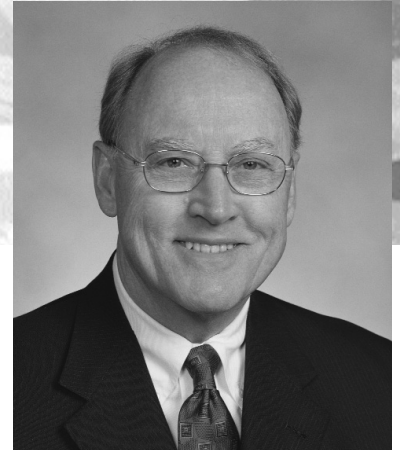


Senator Stephen Johnson



Dear Neighbors,

I hope you enjoyed your summer and that 2004 has been a good year so far. As we begin another school year, I want to report to you on action in the Legislature that will affect our schools.

During the course of our 60-day session earlier this year, we passed some significant changes to our state's K-12 education system. These changes will begin to take shape throughout the 2004-05 school year.

Important issues we addressed this year include changes to our state's Washington Assessment of Student Learning exam, the addition of more parental choice and academic opportunity to our public education system, and help for our local schools who are struggling with funding problems.

Inside this newsletter, I hope to answer many of the questions you might have about these issues. All of the legislation we passed was a byproduct of bipartisan negotiation over the past two years. Much time was spent crafting these proposals which will help better our school-aged children's futures.

If you have additional questions or comments on these or other issues, please don't hesitate to contact my district office in Covington. You'll find the contact information on this page.

It continues to be an honor and privilege to serve as your state senator for the 47th District.

Sincerely,

Senator Stephen Johnson
47th Legislative District

Please keep in touch:

If you would like to provide your input on this or any other legislative situation, you may contact me in the following ways:

By mail:

Sen. Stephen Johnson
PO Box 40447
Olympia, WA 98504-0447

By e-mail:

johnson.stephen@leg.wa.gov
(Be sure to include your name, address, and phone number)

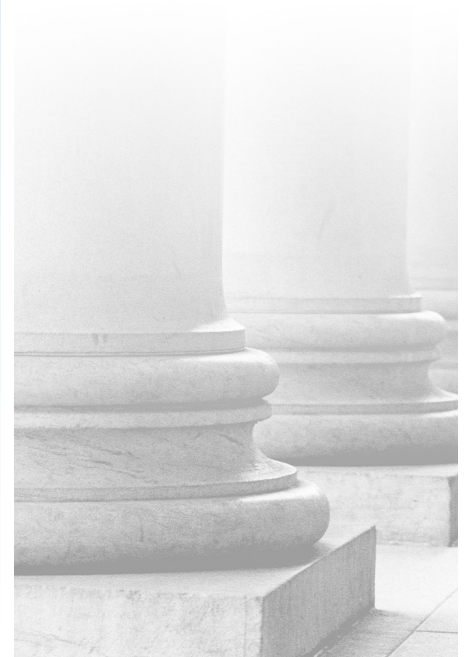
By phone:

District office (253) 872-6434
Olympia office (360) 786-7692
(during session only)

Via the legislative hotline:

1-800-562-6000

Web Site: www.src.wa.gov



Washington Assessment of Student Learning will see changes

The creation and implementation of the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) has been one of the more controversial issues in the education community during the past few years.

Federal regulations under *No Child Left Behind* require states to administer some sort of skills test and Washington was already ahead of the trend because we have the WASL.

However, it became clear in the past few years that some changes were needed. Prior to this session, regulations would have required the Class of 2008 to pass all parts of the 10th grade WASL in order to graduate from high school. This meant students had to pass the WASL on their first try or they wouldn't be able to receive a high school diploma.

Many in the education community felt that this was unfair to students with different learning styles and those who might not be good test-takers. Others simply looked at the statewide 10th grade WASL test scores, and imagined a graduation ceremony with only 40 percent of the senior class participating. Either way it was clear we needed to work on some changes to the testing process before the Class of 2008 takes the test.

I believe the solution we came up with preserves the high standards we're seeking without making the WASL a one-shot make or break test.

The measure we approved, House Bill 2195, makes the following changes to the test:

- **WASL subjects:** WASL testing will be limited to reading, math, writing and science. Listening has been dropped from the graduation requirements. Science doesn't become an official requirement until 2010.
 - **Certificate of Mastery:** The bill changes the name to the Certificate of Academic Achievement (CAA). Students earn the certificate after meeting standards on all parts of the 10th grade WASL.
 - **Retakes:** The bill allows 10th grade students to have up to four retake opportunities if they fail to pass the test on the first try.
 - **Alternative assessment:** The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction will create an alternative assessment for the WASL. Students can go this alternative route after two unsuccessful tries. The alternative must be competitive in rigor to the WASL, and requires the approval of the Legislature.
 - **Special needs students:** Students with learning disabilities will be eligible for an alternative assessment, allowing them to earn a Certificate of Individual Achievement instead of the CAA.
- Providing for retakes was a key component of the bill. It's important to make sure the standards are met before a student graduates from high school. That's why the Legislature will have approval over the alternative assessment. The alternative must be more than simply showing four years worth of homework. It must be something where students can demonstrate the learning skills they've gained throughout high school.

Local schools to receive additional voter approved money

While our economy struggled the past few years, the Legislature managed to create state budgets that avoided raising taxes on our working families. As you likely know, the budget for education saw changes last year when we suspended the two education initiatives, Initiative 728 and 732.

The suspension of these initiatives affected levy funds in many school districts across the state.

Here's why. The amount of money districts can collect through local excess property tax levies is tied to the amount of funding received from the state. The levy portion of the funding of a school district is approximately 20%.

After the passage of Initiative 728 and 732, some Washington districts passed four-year levies based on the expected funding level under the initiatives. This strategy didn't plan for the downturn in the economy. When the economy began to struggle and the initiatives were suspended, the levy base for each district dropped. This meant that although some districts may have passed voted-approved levies to collect a certain amount of money, without the changes we made to state law during the 2004 session, they would have been unable to collect the full amount.

Local districts that now will be able to collect those voter-approved funds in 2005 are Auburn, Renton and Kent.

School choice bill becomes law



The 2004 legislative session marked the first time a new law to allow charter public schools in Washington state passed the full Legislature. With this law, we have joined 40 other states and the District of Columbia which have approximately 850,000 students in 3,000 public charter schools.

A charter public school is a school funded by public money that operates outside of some of the strict rules and regulations on our current public schools. As a result, charter school students often attend school for longer hours and may learn in a different way than they would in traditional public schools. Dramatic results from this restructuring have occurred in public schools serving minority students across the country.

The version of the bill passed this year is much different than the initiative that narrowly failed at the ballot in 2000, as this law targets those children who are struggling and failing in our current public school system.

I believe the bill passed by the Legislature and signed into law by the Governor is a solid compromise after years of hard work on both sides of the issue.

House Bill 2295, the measure we approved, authorizes the creation of up to 45 charter schools over a six-year period. This small number of schools will allow the state to see how well charter schools work in Washington.

The bill makes many specific provisions regarding the creation of charter schools. For example:

- **A majority of charter schools must serve educationally disadvantaged students.** This means those students with limited English proficiency, students with special needs, students who are economically disadvantaged, and students who may

be at risk of failing to meet state and federal academic performance standards. Charter public schools will be another option for districts looking to close the achievement gap. The present structure is simply failing our minority students with fewer than 50% graduating from high school. We are compelled to do better.

- **Charter schools must hire certificated teachers.**

Just like regular public schools, charter school teachers will be certificated in Washington state.

- **Charter schools must accept students on a first-come, first-served basis.** Any student in a district who wishes to attend a charter school may do so. Once a school fills, students would be admitted on a lottery basis. Of course, as public schools, there is no tuition cost.

- **Charter applicants must go to a local school district for approval first.** This is a key change from the previous charter school initiative. If a local school district chooses to not have a charter school, they do not have to accept the charter application. But those districts interested in charters will be able to do so.

- **Traditional public schools may convert to charter schools.** The law permits district traditional schools to convert to public charter schools if they choose to do so in order to enhance student performances.

- **Charter schools in Washington will be studied for their effectiveness.** The Washington State Institute for Public Policy will hold charter schools accountable by directing a study to determine whether charters are improving schools in Washington. A preliminary report is due to the Legislature on March 1, 2007.

It was argued in legislative debate that charter public schools will “take” money from traditional schools. In our state, we have always adhered to the practice of funding “following” the student even as that student moves from one school or district to another or, in this case, to a charter public school. Funding will stay intact for all students in our state under this law and will not deprive any school of state funding for its students.

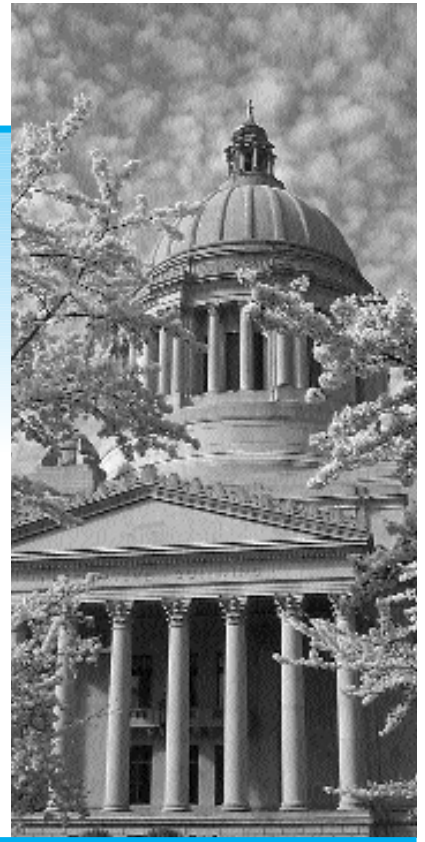
Senator Stephen Johnson

Senator Johnson has served the people of the 47th District in the Washington State Senate since January 1995. He has served as Majority Floor Leader and Deputy Republican Leader.

Senator Johnson is currently the chairman of the Senate K-12 Education Committee. He also serves on the Legislative Ethics Board and as a member of the Senate budget-writing committee, Ways & Means, and as a member of the Senate Judiciary Committee.

Senator Johnson is an attorney. He graduated from Whitman College and the University of Washington School of Law. He is a former member of the Kent School Board.

Senator Johnson and his wife, Lynn, live in Kent. They have a son and a daughter and five grandchildren.



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